



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service



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New Jersey Fact Sheet: Developing Your Forest Stewardship Plan

What Is a Forest Stewardship Plan?

A Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP) is a tool that guides management of a wide variety of natural resources that are found within a property. The purpose of this planning document is to merge a landowner's management objectives with the existing resources, using proven management techniques and expert knowledge. While some planning goals may emphasize economic considerations, such as timber production and forest products, other goals may be non-commodity driven, such as water quality improvement or wildlife habitat enhancement. An FSP must also consider how landowner actions will impact other ecological, historic, and cultural resources found on the property. A good FSP will define a strategy to address existing resource concerns and minimize negative impacts while helping to achieve landowner goals.

Approximately two-thirds of all land in New Jersey is privately owned, making proper forest stewardship on private lands critically important. An FSP can help landowners outline goals and objectives for forest land while enhancing ecosystem health, improving aesthetic value, increasing economic benefit, and creating habitat for a variety of rare and unique plant and animal species.

In New Jersey, FSPs are typically developed for a ten-year period. Eligible lands include private, nonindustrial



This forest stand is being managed under a Forest Stewardship Plan in order to increase tree vigor and improve vegetative structure (Don Donnelly, NJA)

forest lands that are at least five acres in size. Land that does not have existing trees or woody vegetation growth may also be eligible if it is capable of growing woody vegetation. Managing a property under the direction of an approved FSP does not restrict the landowner's ability to generate income from their management activities, nor does it encumber the property with any easements or allow for public access. In many cases, an FSP can be written to meet the enrollment requirements for preferential property tax treatment in New Jersey.

Property tax abatement programs are continually evolving, so interested landowners should discuss the most current program requirements with a New Jersey approved forester. Approved foresters may also be able to answer questions about other potential tax implications when income is generated from selling wood products.

The First Step in Developing a Forest Stewardship Plan: Setting Your Goals

The most important component of an FSP may be the landowner's goals and objectives, which determine all management activities on the property. Having a clear long-term vision is equally important to achieving short-term goals. Asking yourself: "Why do I own this land?" and "What do I want to do with it in 5, 25, and 45



This forest stand is being managed under a Forest Stewardship Plan in order to decrease fuel load and improve habitat for rare plants and animals (Jean Lynch, NJA)



A Forest Stewardship Plan can address several resources found within a forest stand, including wild turkeys and other game animals (left) (© Dean Elsen, USDA Forest Service), nongame species, such as spotted turtles (middle) (© Mike Bisignano), and rare plants such as the yellow lady's slipper orchid (right) (Kristen Meistrell, NJA)

years?" might help formulate that vision and aid in determining what kind of management approach should be taken. Many landowners have a variety of short-term goals, with very different long-term goals that tend to evolve over time. These ideas should be revisited every few years to make sure that stewardship activities remain aligned with objectives.

Determining What Resources Are Included in Your Forest Stewardship Plan

Each Forest Stewardship Plan must address several key resources, including:

- Vegetative cover and species composition, including any invasive plant species
- Water, wetland, and riparian resources
- Soil types and erodibility
- Wildlife resources
- Threatened and endangered plants and animals
- Aesthetics and recreation
- Carbon sequestration
- Historical or cultural resources

Plan preparations typically start with a basic assessment of the different plant communities, or *forest stands*, within a property. The other resources are often



A Forest Stewardship Plan will address critical resources, such as riparian (stream or river) habitats and soil erodibility (John Parke, NJA)

described in the context of how they relate to each forest stand.

The level of detail afforded to each resource may be directly tied to the landowner's goals and objectives, or to how they will be impacted by management activities. For example, an FSP for a landowner who has a primary goal of harvesting timber might include less detail for areas that will be left undisturbed. A section of forest that will not be harvested, located on a steep slope with fragile soils, might be addressed with a comprehensive description of the soil structure and topography, and nothing more than a general description of the vegetation and the stand's value to local wildlife. Another section of forest, where timber harvesting is proposed, would require a great deal more detail. This part of the plan would include not only details about the soils, but also an in-depth analysis of the tree sizes, understory structure, and potential for regeneration; an evaluation of how management activities might impact animals that use the site or invasive species that are nearby; an assessment of how the harvest will affect the forest's ability to store atmospheric carbon; and a description of measures that will be taken to protect nearby streams from damage.

Since the plan preparer may not have expertise in all resource categories, other professionals and agencies are usually consulted during the process. The state's Natural Heritage Database is a common source of information about existing threatened or endangered species, and local historical societies may provide insight into cultural resources on the property. Other specialists, such as biologists working for nonprofit organizations, universities, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, might provide specific recommendations for conserving certain plant or animal species. Other written documents, such as the NJ Division of Parks and Forestry's *Forestry and Wetlands Best Management Practices Manual*, can be incorporated into the plan as tools for guiding management activities in sensitive areas.



Forest assessment and inventory techniques are used to determine the different plant communities found within a property (left) (Lisa Dunne, NJA). This information can then help guide what management activities, such as tree planting (middle) (John Parke, NJA) and girdling (right) (Jean Lynch, NJA), should be implemented.

The Final Steps: Proposing Stewardship Recommendations and Setting a Schedule of Activities

Once the resource assessment is complete, recommendations are formulated and added to the plan. Some recommendations will be targeted and very specific, while others may be more generally applied across a forest. When possible, some planners incorporate several management options into a recommendation, giving the landowner some flexibility. In other instances the options are limited and the sequence of events is imperative to the success of the project. Even with very ambitious property owners who are looking to take on a number of projects, it is important to prioritize and set up a schedule of activities based on:

- The property owner's goals
- The likelihood of project success
- The ability of the landowner to implement the recommendations
- The effort or cost required to achieve success
- The ability, effort, or cost required to *maintain* the project

When practical, the schedule of activities should include provisions for follow-up after a project to monitor success and quickly respond to unexpected results. It is helpful to schedule stewardship activities on a year-by-year basis for the ten-year planning period. This helps to frame a realistic context for how much work can be accomplished over the plan's duration.

Once the plan has been drafted, it should be submitted to the regional New Jersey Forest Service office for approval. While plan approval by the NJ Forest Service does provide authorization for certain regulated activities that require special permits, some projects may require additional approvals by other agencies. An approved forester or natural resource professional can offer assistance as to what additional regulations may apply.

During implementation, the landowner and plan preparer should periodically review the progress of stewardship activities. This is especially true if individual project results are not materializing as expected and adjustments are needed.



A Forest Stewardship Plan may offer recommendations for various resources, including a deer exclusion fence (left) (Kristen Meistrell, NJA) that prevents overbrowsing, the construction of log corduroy roads (middle) (Don Donnelly, NJA) for operations in wetlands, and the use of forestry mowers to reduce invasive plants (right) (Suzanne Treyger, NJA)

Technical and Financial Assistance

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers technical and financial assistance to forest landowners through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Eligible landowners with 10 acres of forest land may receive cost-share assistance for the development of a Forest Stewardship Plan, or for costs related to implementation when part of an approved Forest Stewardship Plan. Forest Stewardship Plans cost-shared through EQIP must be prepared by an NRCS-approved Technical Service Provider (TSP). A list of TSPs can be found at a local NRCS service center or on the New Jersey NRCS website.

NRCS office locations and more detailed information about NRCS assistance and the EQIP program can be found at: www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov

For More Information:

General Information on NRCS Forestry Programs
www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/forestry/index.html

Information on NRCS EQIP Program
www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/forestry.html

Locating an NRCS TSP
<http://techreg.usda.gov/CustLocateTSP.aspx>

NJDEP Forest Service
<http://www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/forest/>

NJDEP Forest Stewardship Plan Requirements
http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/forest/min_guide_nj_stew.pdf



A Forest Stewardship Plan can include a range of objectives, including forest products such as firewood (Don Donnelly, NJA)



A Forest Stewardship Plan can incorporate several landowner objectives, such as fishing, hunting, hiking, and other recreational activities (© George Gentry, USFWS)

NJDEP Forest Service Regional Offices and Contact Information
www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/forest/njfs_regional_offices.html

List of NJDEP-Approved Consulting Foresters
www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/forest/ACF.pdf

NJ Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Strategies
<http://www.stateforesters.org/files/NJ-Assess-Strategy-20100810.pdf>

NJ Forestry and Wetlands Best Management Practices Manual
www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/forest/nj_bmp_manual1995.pdf

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